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THE STORY OF A TON OF COAL

By DANIEL.

IT was a fine snappy day in November —the year, 1812—the place, Philadelphia. Outside Independence Hall men were gathered in little groups discussing excitedly the latest developments in the second unpleasantness with England—the War of 1812. A stranger, bundled up in coonskin, drove up in a big, lumbering wagon in which were heaped large chunks of a substance about which the estimable burghers of the old Quaker city had heard, but which few ever before had seen. It was coal.

The newcomer was Col. George Shoemaker, a respected citizen of Pottsville, Pa. "Does any gentleman here desire to accept some coal? I am giving it away."

The first "coal man" was run out of town for giving away seven wagon loads.

said Col. Shoemaker. For three days he had traveled all over Philadelphia, trying to induce blacksmiths and founders to buy the coal for their forges and householders to purchase this strange substance for their fireplaces. He had brought nine wagon loads of coal into Philadelphia and in three days he had sold only two. And even these had gone for a song.

Now the Colonel, anxious to return to his family in Pottsville and despairing of selling any more of the stuff which men called stone coal, wanted to give away the remaining seven wagon loads. His offer outside Independence Hall brought guffaws and derision. "Colonel, do you really believe that this stone which you call coal will burn?" queried one of the worthy councilmen of the city. "You are a dreamer, Colonel. The Lord hath ordained that we shall burn wood and now you bring us stone. You had better throw it into the Schuylkill and cease flying in the face of nature."

So Col. Shoemaker drove on from Independence Hall, unable to give away any of the seven loads of coal. And as he drove the laughter of his deriders pursued him. But the coal pioneer from Pottsville would not surrender. He was determined that his coal should get a trial in Philadelphia and by noon the next day he had given away the remaining seven loads.

As Col. Shoemaker prepared at his inn for the journey back to Pottsville a friend brought to him strange news. "Those to whom you gave the coal could not make it

In 1820, in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania, only 365 tons were mined.

burn and they have gone to the magistrates and obtained writs for your arrest as an impostor. You had better leave this city at once," he told him.

And so it came to pass that on a November day in 1812 a man who had given away seven wagon loads of coal to citizens of Philadelphia was forced to "flee from justice."

What would happen to Col. Shoemaker could he return to this sphere of trouble and drive his nine wagon loads of Pottsville anthracite up to Independence Hall and offer it at $10 a ton to-morrow morning? The descendants of those estimable burghers of 1812 probably would mob the Colonel in their rush to buy. Descendants of the Kings of Ireland would gather around the Colonel to defend him from too eager purchasers. For to-day the stuff which men called stone coal in derision eleven decades ago and would not accept as a gift—to-day that stuff is king!

American anthracite coal has a remarkable history—a history which is the story of industrial America—a tale which teems with the romance of commerce and manufacture, with adventure and strife. In 1812 coal could not be given away. In 1918 it was a major bone of contention between two nations, for in the peace negotiations after the world war the Ruhr coal fields held a prominent position in Franco-German discussions.

Commerce and wanton waste have depleted our forests. Besides, industry has grown to a point where wood no longer can be used. We must have coal—anthracite, bituminous—thousands and thousands of tons of this black substance which men did not know existed in this country until 160 years ago. We must have coal or our subway trains, our street cars, our railroads and our steamships must come to a standstill. We must have coal or we suffer in the cold while our steam radiators and furnaces freeze with us. We must have coal, or a hundred industries dependent upon coal tar derivatives must cease. We must have coal or organic chemistry is dead and pharmaceutical progress is killed.

The present coal shortage and the present high price of anthracite are not new conditions. We have had them from time to time since the production of coal was started on a large scale in the '40s. Sometimes combinations of coal companies have developed them. Most often they have been the products of strikes by miners. The history of the coal mining industry is the history of recurrent strife and contention between the producer on the one side and the miner on the other—with the suffering public sandwiched helplessly in between. It is the history of violent fluctuation in prices, of juggling with the law

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of supply and demand—the genealogy of a thing which at times becomes priceless.

This story of a ton of coal is a tale which goes back to the time when only 365 tons were mined in the anthracite region in Pennsylvania in 1820 and marches across the years—a journey of nearly a century—to the record of 1918, when 98,826,084 tons—to be very exact and statistical—were produced in the anthracite fields of this country. We are not concerned so much with bituminous, or soft, coal, nearly all of which goes into the industries. This story has to do solely with anthracite, or hard, coal, the stuff we are so anxious to get just now and the scarcity of which after the coal strike of last summer has brought coal administrators, attempts to fix prices, greed, gouging and other conditions to which men have been giving life since the day Cain slew Abel.

In some sections gougers are demanding $22 a ton for stove sizes of anthracite—and getting it from a public whose chattering teeth overcome its financial compunctions. In this city $15 a ton is a fairly prevalent price. Men complain and cry. "The like of this never has been in this country! What are we coming to?"

But the like has been before—and the like will come again. We must have coal and those who have it must get their tidy profit. Coal producers never have been industrial philanthropists and it is not likely that they ever will be. The producer blames it on the miner, the miner blames it on the owner—the public freezes, howls, then pays. So it goes around in

In 1868 the price of coal began falling and by 1876 the wholesale price of a ton was $2.44.

a circle and so it will keep going until the end of all time—or until the end of coal. For scientists say that we have little more than 14,000,000,000 tons of anthracite left in the coal beds of this country.

However, those who may be inclined to become alarmed over the prospect of being left without coal may comfort themselves with the knowledge that the resources of Alaska, China, Siberia, Africa, South America and even certain sections of this country have not been tapped. It may be said that the production of coal as a world industry practically is in its infancy.

The present high price of anthracite of suitable sizes was matched in the very early days and during the civil war. In 1793 coal cost only $1 and $2 at the mines, but by the time it got to the very few who would use it in their big iron grates and Franklin stoves in this city it retailed at from $10 to $20 for the long ton of 2,240 pounds. During the civil war coal was $14 a ton and flour $14 a barrel. There were higher levels from time to time.

Early production figures and prices of hard coal are dealt with by Philip Hone in his remarkable diary—a work which gives us a fine insight into the social, industrial and commercial conditions in New York before the civil war. On November 28, 1839, Mr. Hone made an entry in which he states that he was forcibly struck with the table of coal production for nineteen years. In 1820, writes Mr. Hone—and his figures are substantiated by the Geological Survey report—only 365 tons came from the Lehigh region. In 1839 the production had jumped to a million tons. In 1830 the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company—still in existence as a railroad and coal company with the "canal" elided from its official name—made its first ship-

In 1806 Abijah Smith at Plymouth, Pa., purchased 75 acres of coal lands for $500.

ment—7,000 tons. In 1839 the consumption of coal had become so great that the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company shipped from the coal fields in Pennsylvania to its terminal at Rondout on the Hudson the then astounding total of 122,000 tons.

Eight years later we find Mr. Hone making another entry in his diary about anthracite. On June 16, 1847, he is in Pittsburgh—"the Birmingham of America." He says that coal rolls down from the mountains into Pittsburgh at only $1.20 for the long ton. Suffice it to say that it has not rolled into the "Smoky City" at that price since then.

Just as the history of coal is the story of industrial America, so is the history of coal the story of the development of transportation in this country. First it was carted by wagon, then by canal, then by rail and canal, now by rail from the mines to tidewater. At the start transportation costs were the greatest in the history of coal production. With the development of canals the cost of bringing coal to the consumer was reduced. Now it seems to have jumped to

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another high level, for railroad freight charges are at a record peak.

Let us trace the story of this ton of coal of ours. Let us go back to the day when coal was discovered in this country, back to the method of transporting it and conditions at the little mines of those days, back to the prices and production figures of that pioneer era before the Revolution, and trace King Anthracite to his present high position. One hundred years ago coal fought for public recognition. Now coal battles with steel for the right to give a name to this age. We have had the Stone Age, the Iron Age, Will posterity call this the Coal Age or the Steel Age?

Anthracite was discovered in the Wyoming region in Pennsylvania in 1762 by Parshall Terry and a company of Connecticut pioneers. They found the precious stuff—not so precious just then—on the banks of the Susquehanna River near Wilkes-Barre. The discovery did not

Anthracite was discovered in the Wyoming region of Pennsylvania in 1762, on the banks of the Susquehanna River near Wilkes-Barre.

mean very much at the time, for it was hard to impress on the people the fact that this composition which resembled stone would burn. In a way the doubters could not be blamed, for mining methods in the early days were very crude. The coal was taken out with the slate still attached to it and naturally the stone cover prevented the burning of the coal inside.

Progress in developing a demand for coal was slow. It was quite an event when Obadiah Gore used coal in his black-

Continued on Page Ten.

TABLE OF CONTENTS